



Members of the City Squash cross-country bike team with the Golden Gate... (DAILY NEWS STAFF)

Playing squash a ticket out of the Bronx for struggling teens

BY DANIEL BEEKMAN
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Many Bronx teens never make it out of the borough.

But Felipe Pantle attends an upstate boarding school and is bicycling across the country this month, checking out famous sights such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Grand Canyon.

It's all thanks to squash, a racquet sport traditionally dominated by preppy trust-funders.

Pantle is taking part in a 3,000-mile trip to raise funds for City Squash, a free program for at-risk Bronx youngsters that helped him score a scholarship to Millbrook School in upstate Millbrook.

"I've never been to the West Coast before," said Pantle, 16, of Fordham, speaking to the Daily News by phone from Sacramento on Monday, the first day of the trip.

"But California is pretty cool."

Based on Arthur Ave. in Belmont, City Squash uses the squash courts at Fordham University to train more than 100 budding stars, ages 8 to 18, from local public schools. The program also provides academic tutoring.

Most of the youngsters are from poor, single-parent households, said Bryan Patterson, the program's coach.

"Roughly 75% our kids live on or below the bread line," said Patterson, a former professional squash player from England. "We try to get them out of the Bronx. We try to get them a chance to change their lives."

City Squash graduates have gone on to study and play the sport at some of the state's best colleges, including Cornell University and Hamilton College.

"City Squash has helped me a lot," said Angel Maldonado, 15, of Belmont, a freshman at Berkshire School in Massachusetts. "You don't just play squash the whole time. I got tutoring for math."

Maldonado is also making the 35-day cross-country bike trip that began in San Francisco. He and Pantle are taking turns pedaling and riding in a van. Patterson and two Fordham University students who volunteer for City Squash are biking the whole way.

Andriy Kulak, a Fordham finance major and varsity squash player, said the trip has already raised \$10,000. City Squash's goal is \$100,000.

"We want to get more kids and better computers and equipment," said Kulak, 20, an immigrant from Ukraine who grew up in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn.

"Most people think squash is a sport for the rich. But [City Squash] helps kids reach their physical and academic potential."

To learn more about the City Squash trip or donate to the program, visit citysquash.org and click on the "Bike Ride Across America" button.